IV.
The Churching of Women & Their Children*

A.

When a woman has regained her strength after giving birth, she should, accompanied by some women, make her first visit with her child to the house of the Lord. This can happen either on a Sunday or during a morning or evening service on a weekday. Whenever it occurs, the pastor is notified. He then welcomes the woman at the entrance of the church and says:

P. May the Lord bless your coming in and your going out from this time forth and forevermore.

The woman responds with her companions:

Amen.

If the space at the entrance to the church permits, the pastor says:

P. Let us pray.

Almighty, eternal God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You God of hosts, who presented Your Only Begotten Son with His mother forty days after His birth in Your temple, bless this Your servant, whom we present to You in Your temple — and as she now, guided by us, enters Your sanctuary, may she enter, at the end of this earthly life, into Your heavenly sanctuary, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, who, with You and the Holy Spirit, is a true God, living and reigning forever.

Response of the woman and her companions:

Amen.

Afterwards, he leads them into the church, where they await the worship service.

B.

After the sermon, before the Prayer of the Church, the pastor encourages the congregation to pray...

1. ...when the mother and child are alive:

P. A woman in her sixth week postpartum, attending church today, requests to thank God with her for His paternal assistance in childbirth, the gift of a joyful offspring, the spiritual rebirth of the

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* The seemingly subordinate benediction of women in childbirth was, in the era of the Reformation, not only omitted in some places as indifferent but also rejected as associated with various superstitions. See, for example, the *Church Ordinance of Brandenburg-Nuremberg* 1533: "The blessing after childbirth is not necessary, for it is pure superstition, as if they were defiled by the birth that flees from God's presence." In other places, the celebration was retained, which can indeed be interpreted quite differently than the Brandenburg Church Ordinance admits. The manner in which the celebration was conducted according to earlier customs can be seen from the above compilation. We have summarized what we found and present the indifferent act in this rich and overflowing manner. In any case, this blessing of women in childbirth is more akin to marriage than to baptism, of which it is neither an after-ceremony nor an appendage. It is a thanksgiving and supplication for delivery and birth. This is also how it is understood in the Roman Catholic Church and is simply called "*Ordo introducendi mulieres in ecclesiam post partum*" (Order of introducing women into the church after childbirth). We mention this solely to justify the position we have given it, as it is not universally found in the same way.

child through holy baptism, and her own physical recovery. It is requested that God may graciously sustain and preserve both mother and child for His glory.

2. ...when the child has passed away:

P. A woman in her sixth week postpartum attends church today and asks the congregation to thank the dear God with her. Although the little one has been taken away by the One who gave it, the Lord has still preserved the mother and restored her to reasonable strength. We pray that God may continue to sustain the mother and grant her patience in the cross imposed upon her.

3. ...when the child is stillborn:

P. A woman in her sixth week postpartum attends church today and asks the congregation to thank the dear God with her. Although there has been great distress in childbirth, and the child has died during the process, the Lord has still provided separation, preserved the mother and restored her to reasonable strength. We pray that God may continue to sustain the mother and grant her patience in the cross imposed upon her.

C.

At the end of the Service of the Sacrament before the Benediction, the pastor remains standing at the altar, and the woman in her sixth week postpartum kneels with her companions in front of the altar.

P. The Lord be with you.

And with thy spirit.

A. When the mother and child are alive and present:

P. Although, due to sin, a curse has been pronounced upon all daughters of Eve, "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children," it remains a special grace of God that a woman is blessed with fruit of the womb, the child is formed, nourished, and preserved in her womb, and the mother is delivered from it with great anxieties. Here, through the joyful sight, all fear quickly disappears, and all sorrow is transformed into joy. Therefore, we find it fitting to humbly acknowledge the gracious work of the great God and speak thus with the holy psalmist:

Psalm 139:14–18.

14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

15 My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

16 Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

17 How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!

18 If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.

Then the response is given:

I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Hallelujah.

Following this, the pastor continues in prayer:

Psalm 22:9-10.

9 But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts.

10 I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly.

Thou art He that took me out of the womb. Hallelujah.

Psalm 127:3-5.

3 Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.

4 As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.

5 Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.

Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord. Hallelujah.

P. Let us pray.

Afterwards, he prays with those present: "Our Father, etc., until Amen."*
Then he lays hands on the woman in her sixth week postpartum and continues in prayer:

P. Almighty, merciful God, heavenly Father, we offer You praise, honor, and thanks from the depths of our hearts that You have helped this Your servant in the cross imposed upon her, brought her joy with a joyful sight, and reborn her child in Your baptism and gifted *him/her* with Your Spirit. We ask You through Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, to continue to have mercy on this Your servant, guard her from all evil and misfortune, strengthen her with Your Holy Spirit, sustain her in Your pure Word, graciously care for and watch over her, so that through her, Your Christian community may be built up, and heaven may be planted with chosen children, those flowers of zeal and oaks of righteousness. Preserve, O Lord, her coming in and going out in true faith unto life everlasting, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Response:

Amen.

Then conclude the service with the Benediction.

B. If the child has died during childbirth or shortly thereafter, baptized or unbaptized:

P. God, the Lord, has, according to His gracious will, saddened our sister, bestowing upon her a stillborn child and transforming the hoped-for joy into sorrow and swiftly taking the blessedly born fruit of her womb back to Himself through death. Therefore, we should indeed weep with the one who weeps. However, it is also fitting to comfort those who are sad. Now that the little

* Between the Lord's Prayer and the collect, the cries for help or versicles mentioned as an annotation on page 433 would certainly be quite fitting. We have applied them appropriately in the form of a sick visit in the first edition of this book and continue to use them in this edition on similar occasions. Psalm, Kyrie, Lord's Prayer, versicles, and collect undoubtedly form a complete and cohesive unit here, as everywhere else.

child has escaped the dangerous unrest of the world through death in *his/her* mother's womb and entered into the certain peace of heaven, we all have cause to console our dear sister and hope that she will willingly and gladly be content with God's approval. We are also obligated to thank with her and for her that the Lord has preserved her thus far in this painful childbirth.

Let us, therefore, humbly bend our knees before the Lord and speak with the holy Job, who had lost all his children:

Job 1:21.

Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.

Response:

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Hallelujah.

Then the pastor continues in prayer:

Job 2:10.

Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?

Response:

We have received good from God. Hallelujah.

Lamentations 3:22-24.

22 It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

23 They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

24 "The Lord is my portion," saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

The compassions of the Lord fail not. Hallelujah.

P. Let us pray.

Afterwards, he prays with those present: "Our Father, etc., until Amen."

Then he lays hands on the woman in her sixth week postpartum and continues in prayer:

P. We thank You, O Lord, heavenly Father, that You have been a faithful helper and comfort in *name*'s anxieties and pains, lifting her from the bed by Your paternal goodness and grace through Your Almighty hand, extending the grace period as a merciful Savior. We also pray that You may enlighten her through Your precious Holy Spirit, so that she may recognize Your heavenly counsel, submit to it, and without doubt believe that You have removed the fruit of her womb from this poisonous world, ensuring her of her child's safe arrival to eternal life. May she rise one day with her child and all believers to eternal joy and glory. Grant, through her cross, that our sister may willingly forsake everything on earth for Your sake and cling solely to You, the imperishable and eternal treasure. Grant this through Jesus Christ, Your Son."

Amen

Then conclude the service with the Benediction.

D.

Appendix

If a mother dies during the postpartum weeks, the midwife or another woman carries the child to the church, kneels with it in front of the altar after the Service of the Sacrament before the Benediction, and the pastor speaks:

P. Dear Christians, the royal Psalmist David speaks in Psalm 27: "Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me." Thus, Holy Scripture teaches us that God does not forget the orphans but takes these poor little ones as His own, graciously cares for them, and will sustain them. Therefore, He is also called a Father and Helper of the orphans and promises that the generation of the righteous will be blessed. Since it is so, it is only right that we present this poor motherless orphan to Him and entrust it to His divine protection. In order to do this with all seriousness, let us consider what Christ says in Matthew 18:5–6:

> "Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

And verses 10–11:

> "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost."

P. Let us pray.

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.

Our Father, etc.

Amen.

P. Almighty, eternal God, we offer You praise and thanks that You have created this child, redeemed *him/her* through Your only begotten Son, bestowed grace upon *him/her* in baptism with the Holy Spirit, and accepted *him/her* as an heir of eternal life. We earnestly ask You to continue to have mercy on *name*, strengthen *him/her* in body and soul, choose pious friends in place of the mother from whom *he/she* has been deprived by death, who may raise it in a Christian and proper manner, so that *he/she* may become a lovely branch of honor, serving You with all believers in holy obedience, and praising and glorifying You both now and forever.

Amen.

Afterwards, the pastor lays hands on the little child and prays:

Psalm 121:

1 I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

2 My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.

3 He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.

4 Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.

6 The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.

8 The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

Amen.

Then conclude the service with the Benediction.